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THE MARGARET SONNETS

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From the Author

THE

MARGARET SONNETS.

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THE MARGARET SONNETS.

I.

Fair June is here, with all its warmth and light;
And very pleasant are the glowing hours;
The chesnut trees are half concealed by flowers,
And every hawthorn bush is robed in white.
In full-leaved splendour oak and lime are bright,
Untanned by summer suns, unbruised by showers.
And birds are singing in their leafy bowers,
Sheltered securely from the traveller's sight.

Willow and ash with their first leaves are decked,
With fallen elm-flowers is the road-side flecked;—
But not the song of birds, not the warm breeze,
Not the sweet odours which the flowers impart,
Nor all the leafy glories of the trees,
From thoughts of thee can move my constant heart.

II.

Accept our earliest, choicest rose, dear friend,
And braid it with your hair for my love's sake;
Its pale buff petals fairer hues will take
If o'er your auburn tresses it may bend.
'Tis said love's glamoury light at times will lend
To smallest offerings glowing charms that break
Like sunshine on a woman's heart, and make
Light dancing joys on all her steps attend.

And though I may not hope so rich a spell
Round gift of mine for thy dear heart may dwell,
Yet, Margaret, take the blooming bud I send,
And nurse its delicate life for my love's sake;
And know that if the trifle shall awake
One gleam of pleasure, I have gained my end.

III.

Friend of my soul, my Margaret ever dear,
This day is sacred unto love and thee;
With the first dawn my spirit wanders free
To meet thee on the hills of Devonshire.
The level sun doth gild thy forehead clear,
The cool fresh breezes wafted from the sea
Wanton amid thy tresses lovingly,
And birds are warbling music in thine ear.

To bounding fancy yielding all the reins
Methinks I walk with thee in Devon lanes,
Kiss thy dear lips beneath the shadows gray,
And pray from lowest depth of heart sincere
That God may bless thee on thy natal day,
And on all days through every coming year.

IV.

For thee my prayers to Heaven's high gate ascend
In every hour that blushes in the light,
When sleep forsakes me in the midmost night
My spirit floateth towards thee, darling friend!
And sure this boundless love a joy will lend
Blessing beyond the range of chance or spite,
And make our daily pathways glad and bright
Till life and all its cares and cravings end.

And joyful were the hope that we might meet
Beyond the Pleiads and the Northern Wain
In that blessed world were partings are no more;
For my fond heart could crave no higher gain
Than listening ever to thy accents sweet,
Resting with thee upon the eternal shore.

V.

Nay, fear not, Margaret, that thy friend is sad;
Fear rather that this wealthy dower of love
May overweight his feeble powers, and prove
Honey of Trebizond to drive him mad;
More precious than the balm of Gilead
Rich manna rained upon me yesterday,
And I have brought a glorious store away
And live upon it hourly and am glad.

Choicer than food that fed the Israelite
Far from a home in heart-desirèd land
My manna wastes not with the dews of night;
With this o'erflowing treasure in my hand
I walk by faith, and wait for perfect sight
When life's bright glass will run with golden sand.

VI.

As yester-eve I travelled towards the West,
Just as the Autumn day its hours had told,
Before my charmèd vision was unrolled
A scene that breathed deep joy into my breast
And whispered fancies of Elysian rest;
For calmly floating on a sea of gold,
And purple-tinted like the heath-clad wold,
Methought I saw the islands of the Blest.

And far beyond them all four several bands
Of yellow light shot upwards in the sky
Towards bright Arcturus and the Boreal crown.
Thy home is nearer to those purple lands,
Say, did the glorious vision greet thine eye,
Stretching beyond the corn-fields shorn and brown?

VII.

Belovèd of my heart I feel thee near,
Endymion I, thou Dian in her might,
Though bodily presence gladdens not my sight
Thy love folds round me as the atmosphere
Folds over hill and valley mead and mere
Makes tower and church and lonely homestead bright,
And steeps the golden sheaves in glamoury light
When glorious Autumn crowns the ripened year.

Such the rich dowry by my soul possessed:
And if my love, sweet friend, avail to throw
Around thy daily path a kindred glow
With fullest joy will both our hearts be blest;
And smooth the current of our years will flow
To their last bourne in the Life-ocean's breast.

VIII.

Dearest, I long have held this precept true,
'The primal instincts of the heart are sound,
Co-ordinate them and their aims pursue
And thus life's choicest blessings will be found :'
So thought I when thou first didst glad my view,
And my heart leaped towards thee with joyous bound.

So feel I still, by no dark dreams oppressed,
For potent spell hath wrought my spirits' cure ;
Since thou canst love me yet retain thy rest
Believe me, darling, I indeed am blest
Although thou may'st not sleep upon my breast :
The storms of life I bravely shall endure,
And strive to make my heart a temple pure,
Not all unworthy of its angel guest.

IX.

Margaret, though absent I esteem thee near,
Though lone I am not all alone to-day,
Thy thoughts go with me as I take my way
Down the green lanes of pleasant Hertfordshire.
Thy voice is ringing alway in mine ear,
And flashing through my soul a gentle ray
Shot from thy earnest eyes of azure gray
Has found a power to reach and bless me here.

Dear one, I have built up a shrine secure
Where I shall love and worship all my days,
And my tossed heart will find a refuge sure
And a strong light to guide her mid dark ways;
And there for aye will stand thy image pure,
Portal and window safe from vulgar gaze.

X.

As travellers beneath the arctic sky
Pine for the sun in the long polar night,
So pines my heart, my loved one, for the light
That lives within the circle of thine eye.
Though letters come, like stars that hang on high,
Or like the Boreal coruscations bright
That with strange splendour gladden all the sight,
Yet without thee my heart must droop and die.

In the still temple of my love I bow,
And feed my little lamps of faith and hope,
And utter many an unrecorded vow
Before thy glorious image shrined there;
And seek new strength in life's lone paths to grope,
Till love's bright sun shall dawn in upper air.

XI.

Musing I sit within our mossy dell,
Shaded by hornbeam, lime, and sycamore.
And as a miser counts his golden store,
So reckon I the treasures rich that dwell
Securely shrined in memory's inmost cell :
Words, looks, and tones replete with love's sweet lore,
Around my spirit floods of rapture pour,
That with soft rythmic movement sink and swell.

But I must rouse me from my musing hour,
I feel my Margaret's presence and her power
Calling my spirit unto nobler aims,
Bidding me not to play the miser's part,
Nor, self-absorbed, grow heedless of the claims
Of outer life upon my mind and heart.

XII.

One work of love with life alone will cease
And may not be accomplished; for my aim
Is all unmeeted to the powers I claim;
And yet when death my spirit shall release
Unresting I shall roam and find no peace
Unless some echo from the voice of fame
Shall tell me I have matched my Margaret's name
With names of Laura and fair Beatrice.

I would that poets through the ages long
Should link my love with all that is most fair,
Proclaim her like tall Dian, lithe and strong,
Like Venus beautiful, like Pallas wise;
While future Raphaels limn her fair brown hair
And the Egyptian slope of her gray eyes.

XIII.

When spent is all the force of wind and storm
The clouds at times will break and float away
In golden glory on the track of day;
And oft compressed emotion, wild and warm,
Into poetic utterance will transform,
And take the fairest rainbow hues, and throw
Around the jaded heart a genial glow,
And soothe its sorrows with a Gilead balm.

Such welcome respite, such brief joy is mine
If subtle alchemy of brain transmute
Voiceless emotion into shapely song;
And if some beauty flash along the line
To thee, dear friend, it doth of right belong;
For thou the player art, and I the lute.

XIV.

Margaret, dear heart, sole fountain of my weal,
I am not sad though thou art far away ;
For often doth my thankful spirit feel
The far off sunshine on the cloudy day ;
The purple beams of love around me play,
Bearing a mighty power to soothe and heal,
They break in beauty through the murky gray,
And glorious vistas to my sight reveal.

Yet come to me, my dear one, for I long
To gaze once more into those earnest eyes,
And hear again the music of thy voice
Richer and sweeter than a Seraph's song :
Come to me, darling of my fondest choice,
My loving heart could crave no wealthier prize.

XV.

Despair had bound me with an iron chain,
For weary weeks I deemed that thou wert changed,
That thy dear heart was from my heart estranged,
And nought of refuge found I in my pain
From the long anguish of my fevered brain.
Forgive the madness, love, forgive the doubt
That seized my soul and shut the daylight out,
And with wild frenzy urged me to complain.

The cloud that smirched the firmament above
Has turned its silver lining to my sight;
Back to my ark returns the peaceful dove
And brings an olive branch with flowerets bright;
Again I feel the sunshine of thy love,
Again I thank my God for life and light.

XVI.

Joyful I bask beneath love's purple beam,
And death and darkness turn to life and light,
Soon will thy presence greet my gladdened sight;
This sun-scorched brow of mine ere long, I deem,
Will feel the kiss that blessed me in my dream.
Ye lazy hours speed swiftly in your flight,
Lead on the day, lead on the dewy night,
Till Margaret come flow on in rapid stream.

Then steal along as slowly as ye may,
Bring warmth, and light, and flowers, and the gay song
Of the young birds that in the greenwood throng;
And linger while I walk adown the glade
Beside my love, or 'neath the lime-trees stay
And listen to her voice amid the shade.

XVII.

All may be lost where aught is to be gained,
Unless the powers of reason we employ
We reap a sorrow when we snatch at joy,
We grasp at honour and with shame are stained.
If common appetite be unrestrained
The food whereby we live full soon would cloy
Our gross and pampered bodies, and destroy
The life it should have nourished and sustained.

The fires that fill our homes with warmth and light
In cold dark days with thoughtful care we tend.
Or life and shelter soon would find an end.
We hold a two-edged sword, our crowning bliss.
The source and well-spring of our happiness;—
Be it ours to use the fearful gift aright.

XVIII.

Though brief and glorious Autumn days have ended
And clouds and fog must hide thee from my view,
Not with unmingled pain I bid adieu,
For with my love thy being's love is blended.
If on we press, by faith and hope attended,
Each earthlier impulse mindful to subdue,
Yet to our noblest instincts ever true,
By all good souls our love will be commended.

Ever to thee with reverent heart I kneel
And nurse my holiest feelings at thy shrine;
And thou, sweet friend, from this deep love of mine
Methinks will draw some power to soothe and heal;
Some culture that for good thy soul shall sway,
Some needful light to guide thee on thy way.

XIX.

When a fair stream is lost in the broad sea
It may forget its banks, forget the hours
It sported gaily with the water-flowers,
And to the Nymph that haunts the willow-tree
Straightway forget its ancient loyalty.
And when the current of my years shall rest,
Its last wave thrown on the life-ocean's breast,
Perchance will vanish every thought of thee.

I cannot tell, dear heart, but this I know ;—
My love will never lose its wonted glow,
No place will be a solitude to me
Till life and thought and feeling cease to flow :
For where I am there wilt thou ever be,
Holding the central place in pensive memory.

XX.

Ah, once I deemed that earth could not impart
The bounteous blessing of a love like thine ;
And I should pass from life and find no shrine
Where I could pour the worship of my heart.
Now when the teardrops to my eye-balls start,
While perfect love around my heart doth twine,
I weep that thou canst ne'er be wholly mine,
And deepest joy doth bring my keenest smart.

Yet welcome both ; since the stern fates combine
My weal and woe as web and woof together,
Like a dark banner shot with one fair star,
I will not idle murmur nor repine,
But onward press through every change of weather
Sure that thy love will bless me from afar.

XXI.

Yes, it is more and better than a dream
To know that thy pure heart is mine for aye ;
That love for me doth mingle with the stream
Of thy pure thoughts through all their range and play.
Thus dowered I live, rejoicing in the beam
That comes to bless me on the week's best day ;
Thus do I walk life's humble path, and deem
An unseen friend beguiles my lonely way.

And if sometimes a fuller utterance
From thy heart's depths shall ravish every sense
With the full tide that swept my soul of yore,—
While yet our love was in its earliest spring,—
If such rich gifts some golden days may bring
Methinks my grateful heart could crave no more.

XXII.

Well may you weary of my rhymes, and deem,
With show of reason, that my dreamy mind
To nature's manifold glories must be blind,
Can draw no wisdom from heaven's clearest beam,
No inspiration from earth, sky, or stream,
And moves unconscious as a village hind
Amid the mighty thoughts that shake mankind,
Harping for ever on an outworn theme.

Nay earth and sea and sky to me are fair,
Tales of heroic daring charm mine ear,
And noble thoughts unto my heart are dear;
But when I prize them most some alchemy
Transmutes them into loving dreams of thee,
Symbol and type of all things grand and rare.

XXIII.

On dizzy height of mountain far away
Now rocked by noisy night-winds into rest,
Anon awakened by the morning's ray,
Haply some unfledged eaglet in his nest
Longs for the day when he shall bathe his breast
In winds from North and South, from East and West,
And with unwinking eye, unflagging pinion,
Soar proudly upward through the air's dominion

Little he dreams that pip or weak pea-feather
Shall mar his power to brave or wind or weather,
Till, madly struggling with too fierce a blast
E'er yet the gristle of his youth be past,
Down from those soaring heights he shall be cast
To crawl with limping feet among the heather.

XXIV.

And like that unfledged eaglet, all unwise,
Full little deemed I, in the glorious hour
When my young brain rejoiced in growing power,
And the world's honour seemed an easy prize,
That later years would fail to realise
The cherished object of my earliest aim,
And never would the citadel of fame
Yield to my patient siege or quick surprise.

Well, though ripe judgment tells of humbler powers,
Thank God, in lowest vales lie fair green bowers,
And duties clustering round my pathway now
Cheer me with hope past errors to redeem,
And if fruition crown my later dream
I yet shall twine some laurels for my brow.

XXV.

No longer in the East the tempest lowers :
The lightning flash, our lately conquered slave,
Has shot o'er land and dived beneath the wave,
Bringing glad tidings from the Austrian powers
That Russia yieldeth and the day is ours.
Thanks to the heroes mouldering in the grave ;
A thousand thanks unto the living brave ;
For those the cypress weave, for these weave flowers !

And twine bright weaths of laurel for the brows
Of statesmen, who have sought with eager zeal,
Through good and ill report the public weal,
Labouring all holier feelings to arouse ;
Struggling to make the din of battle cease
And bless all Europe with a lasting peace !

XXVI.

As Winter striding wildly o'er the plain
With snows and biting frosts prepares the soil
Gratefully to reward the peasant's toil
In the far Autumn;—so the hurricane
That late hath swept across the Euxine main,
And over Alma, and made dire turmoil
At Balaclava, shall yield noble spoil;
For blood of heroes floweth not in vain.

Soon by the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn
To virgin harbours shall the trader sail,
And bear to nations dwelling by the morn
From Western workshops many a wealthy bale,
Then homeward bring rich freights of wine and corn,
To bless the workmen and their children pale.

XXVII.

O friend devoutest of my choice, when last
I met you in the dear paternal grange
My earnest words unto your ear seemed strange ;
With woman's heart you clung unto the past,
Refused to give your thoughts unfettered range,
And held that truth upon our earth was cast
To live through all the ages without change.

I deemed our grasp of truth a partial thing,
Becoming ever broader and more free
As minds could learn to soar on stronger wing ;
Shall intellects divide when hearts agree ?
Keep thou thy creed, dear friend, and leave me mine ;
Yea, keep thy creed for aye, enough for me
That it can nourish such a heart as thine.

XXVIII.

Never, my dear one, can I range with those
  Who with the growing light a war would wage,
  And dread the progress of our mighty age
And the great truths which science may disclose.
Though for a while new light may throw in shade
  Our long inheritance from saints and seers,
  Chief issue, growth, and outcome of the years,
I welcome it with spirit unafraid.

And will not with a rash and unfledged zeal
  Which cannot hold its own and wait awhile
  Apparent discords haste to reconcile,
But watch for truths new voices may reveal.
Sure that though forms and frameworks change, the root
  Of all the good and true the past did give
  In the great heart of man will ever live,
And with new time will ripen nobler fruit.

XXIX.

Not to the ancient seer alone was given
The power to scan the future, and to see
The glorious thing that was not, yet would be;
But in all times, by favour of kind Heaven,
The gifted man—by scathing tempests driven
For weary years, yet striving valiantly—
Reaches at length a Pisgah, and stands free
On heights by which the clouds of time are riven.

Nay, rather say the earnest, fearless mind
Endowed with strong assimilative power
And blest with genial suns and the free air
Becomes a Pisgah for all human kind:
And weak men climb his heights, and standing there,
See the far glories of the coming hour.

XXX.

Whether rich cargo or mere stones and dust,
The ship that takes the ocean must have freight —
A something that shall give the needful weight
To meet and counterpoise the billows' thrust.
And minds must take opinions upon trust,
To ballast them amid the waves of fate;
Until, emerging from the infant state,
They learn to estimate the true and just.

Many there are, noble of heart and brave,
Who linger ever in the infant stage,
And carry their chance cargo to the grave,
Nor ever test the value of the store;
Thrice happy if their country and their age
Give them, for very ballast, golden ore.

XXXI.

Well may the poet in his power rejoice,
He holds a noble talisman and spell;
This is his mission, if I read it well,
And this at once his instinct and his choice;—
To give a definite form, a living voice,
To vague and mute heart-cravings, and impart
Touches of feeling to the callous head,
Glimpses of thought unto the dreamy heart.

Smooth flowing verse of idle fancies bred,
He leaves to cunning rhymesters, and would wed
His muse to noble thought and generous aim;
So that his heart be pure he heeds not blame;
And if the good cause and the true be sped,
He little cares to leave behind a name.

XXXII.

Would you the first of human virtues seek?
Ask a grand-hearted woman, and, ere long,
Her heart to yours in music tones will speak,
And this will be the burden of her song:—
Let weak men give due reverence to the strong;
And let the strong in mind in heart be meek,
And give their utmost service to the weak.

The end and aim of every human gift
Lies not in him who holds the gift unbought,
By favour, not by merit; and the dower
May well indeed beguile the lonely hour
With luxury of meditative thought;
But only is well-used when used to lift
Inferior minds unto a higher power.

XXXIII.

As matter tendeth ever to maintain
  Unvarying motion or eternal rest
  As it hath been by outward force impressed,
So over mind the self-same law doth reign :
And we imbibe opinions wild or sane
  Which like an atmosphere our souls invest ;
  Hence the equipment in which minds are dressed,
And hence the bent and bias of the brain.

Though new environment and native force
Deflect us somewhat from our early course
  And gathering years may bring some critic power.
All this tells little on the average mind,
By growing habit and mere sloth inclined
  To clasp old creeds more closely hour by hour.

XXXIV.

Ah! why, stern Winter, wilt thou strive to wield
The sceptre, now thy rightful reign is o'er?
Fly poleward, and to gentle Spring restore
Her wrested empire; to thy daughter yield
An easy sway o'er garden-plot and field;
So southern gales and genial showers shall pour
A primal beauty on our island shore.

As vainly strive old forms with truths revealed
To younger insight and a later thought,
So dost thou strive, with chill and noisy blast,
All vainly to renew an outworn past.
Then yield, stern sire, content to have fulfilled
A purpose with much love and mercy fraught:
Now milder powers must rule; so Heaven hath willed.

XXXV.

A shepherd playing on the rudest pipe
And framing quaintest verses to the praise
Of one he deems the light of all his days
I hold to be philosopher unripe:
For he has found a symbol and a type
Round which all forms of loveliness may cling;
A root from which in later days may spring
The mellowest fruitage: even though the gripe

Of death or sterner fates that haunt the earth
May early snatch his cherished friend away
His love may leaven all his soul for aye;
And change to something of a higher worth,
That shall rich culture to his mind impart
And throw a lasting radiance round his heart.

XXXVI.

My life is like an ocean white with foam
And work is heaped on work like wave on wave;
I cannot have the leisure that I crave
To sit in slippered ease within my home,
And con with studious care some thoughtful tome
Writ for our use by learnèd men and brave.
Yet, since I would not have my mind a grave,
Often, as down some quiet path I roam,

I strive to reproduce in humble lays
Thoughts I have gathered in more leisure days;
Or seek to give some due embodiment
To passing fancies or to cherished views,
To feeling, thought, or vague presentiment;
And dash the picture with some personal hues.

XXXVII.

From me no prayer ascends for length of days,
I ask nor wealth, nor power, nor human praise;
Nor envy I the claims of noble birth
To stand among the great ones of the earth:
I do not seek the poet's crown of bays;
Though these are treasures of high mark and worth,
Of choicer blessings I have larger dearth:

I crave a mental vision clear and keen,
Prompt to receive with achromatic power
A faithful image of each outward thing.
And yet my spirit craves a further dower,—
A grasp of thought to comprehend the scene,—
A heart to feel what all these glories mean,—
An ear to hear what seers and poets sing.

XXXVIII.

Full half my earthly pilgrimage is done,
And I must travel on in darkened ways;
For clouds are gathering round me, and the sun
Shines not above as in the olden days.
I am as one around whose paths are spun
The toiler's wily snares; and the rough bays
Of blood-hounds urge me on through tangled ways,
And o'er steep crags it is not mine to shun.

Already have my banded foes begun
To stretch the bowstring and to barb the dart:
Thank God! from love's own smile a charm I've won
To rob my venomed wounds of all their smart;
And fiercest blows will neither slay nor stun
While I am sheltered in my Margaret's heart.

XXXIX.

I am as one shut up in earless den
  Unvisited by sun and the free air,
  Weighed to the earth beneath a load of care
Heavier, methinks, than falls to other men.
Sweet rest will come at last, but how or when
  I know not: my own burden I will bear.
  Nor yield unto the promptings of despair.
Nor show my heart-wounds unto vulgar ken.

Margaret, my long-tried friend, thou knowest all
  That fills my soul with anguish and dismay;
Though on mine ears no tones of thine may fall
  From thy true heart I am not cast away:
I hear thy spirit answer to my call
  And bid me on its plighted troth to stay.

XL.

When lone I muse upon life's blighted aim,
And see all wrecked upon a desert shore
Without one twinkle of their ancient flame
The glowing hopes that dazzled me of yore:
When I reflect upon the growing claim
Upon my failing strength and wasted store,
And feel my fate to work a barren ore,
I sink o'erwhelmed with grief and burning shame.

Yet have I one strong refuge, dearer far
Than all the treasures ravished in their bloom;
One blessing which, methinks, no time can mar;
One joy could glad me 'neath a heavier doom:
For love is ever with me like a star
That shows no parallax, permits no gloom.

XLI.

'Dear friend, a mountain seems a mighty thing
To one who standeth close beside its base ;
Of fairest realms beyond it hides the trace,
And a vast shadow o'er the vale doth fling.
But if above its utmost peak he spring
Till his clear ken a hemisphere embrace,
And far-spread glories smite him on the face,
Small claim to notice doth the mountain bring.

'When you shall leave this vale and soar away
To regions all our own of clearest day
This shelving rock-high grief which now doth robe
Your constant heart in shades of thickest gloom
Shall round to a small mole-hill on a globe
Of love that stretcheth where no shadows loom.'

XLII.

'Why should we wonder if our spirits play
With an unequal flow? Not always bright
Shines the broad face of heaven; and gloomy night
For ever follows on the track of day.
The darkest clouds disperse; and twilight grey
Leads onward ever till the growing light
Of morning break upon our gladdened sight;
More grateful for the gloom just past away.

'And though our lot awhile seem dark and drear
In uncomplaining patience let us wait;
Nor doubt that brighter, happier days are near,
Nor that God's love will reach our low estate:
Soon will bright streaks of morning light appear
And make our fainting hearts with joy elate.'

XLIII.

What want of wit hath sown let wisdom reap
And clear the soil for harvest of some gain,
With diligent labour parting tares from grain
Though this a mole-hill, that a mountain-heap.
Misfortunes harm us little while we keep
The springs of life elastic, and sustain,
As Spencer quaintly bids, our nerves and brain
On those two massive pillars, Food, and Sleep.

These failing not, the past we may redeem,
And by-gone errors into beacons turn
To guide 'mid sunken rocks with steady beam
Though darkness lie around and overhead:
And haply in the coming years may earn
Haven of rest among the honoured dead.

XLIV.

A lonely lot is his whose thoughts and views
On problems which all earnest minds engage
Accord not with the standard of his age :
Unless from some broad gathering ground he choose
Companions tinted with congenial hues
In his own breast his thoughts he must encage,
Or trust them only to the fair white page,
And all the sweets of fellowship must lose.

Bereft of a broad intellectual base
For common standing-ground, how poor and bald
Becomes the intercourse of daily life !
How dreary grows that heartless thing miscalled
Society ! How fruitful oft of strife
E'en with the very brothers of our race !

XLV.

The mind's first answers have been weak and rude,
Questions of gravest import could not wait
A slow solution, and with pressure great
Claimed instant answers be they ne'er so crude:
And such have served the human heart for food
Through the long period of its infant state;
And when experience brought another freight
Mellowed by all the summers, gratitude

For what had nourished infant limbs so long,
And custom which the ages had made strong,
And the mere weight and drag of rear and wing
Made rank and file of human hearts to cling
With passionate emotion to the past,
Accept the mind's first teachings and reject her last.

XLVI.

To him who with discerning eyes shall scan
Our island growth of mind it will appear,—
Whether it be by instinct or deep plan
Deliberately conceived,—thus much is clear:
Our leading minds move slowly, and the van
Waits with untiring patience for the rear;
Not willingly it leaves a single man
To lag behind in deserts lone and drear:

From every loved companionship to stray
Were deemed a meagre pleasure, dearly bought;
Better upon the level plain to stay
And help the feebler travellers on their way
That van and rear upon some later day
May stand abreast upon the heights of thought.

XLVII.

Cut down the trunk, there's life within the root ;
  Take the tree's crown ; the trunk lives many a year :
  Branches may flourish, yet no flowers appear ;
And flowers may fade and fall and leave no fruit.
  Take animals away, and plants may thrive ;
  Deprive the earth of man, and beasts survive :
And man, whom with some reason we compute
  To be the crown of earthly life, may part
  With all the fruits of mind, and flowers of heart,
And long may flourish as a human brute.

Thus through all nature is this law engrained ;—
  All higher things by aid of lower grow,
  And thence draw all their being ; but the low
Are less dependent and more self-sustained.

XLVIII.

Within the heart all problems have their source,
For mind hath neither motive power nor fire
And only moves impelled by some desire;
Heart sets the aim; mind demonstrates the course;
Mind gives the light; and heart supplies the force;
Heart puts all questions; mind gives all replies:
And vainly doth the intellect aspire
To act without the promptings of its sire:
Nor can the blind and hungry heart dispense
With the keen eyesight of intelligence.

The strife of years can have this only term;—
Alliance based upon concessions wise
And mutual respect and reverence:—
Even now methinks a treaty is in germ.

XLIX.

Nay, laugh not lightly at the wan recluse
  Who cons with feeble eye the musty page
  Or counts his beads in some lone hermitage ;
Who holds with human sciences no truce,
And spurns our modern aims, and doubts the use
  Of half the boasted glories of our age.
  What if the contest oft awake his rage?
An honest zeal may prove no light excuse.

Though the strait trammels of a narrow creed
  To much of deepest worth the monk doth blind,
  Perchance with purpose firm and earnest mind,
  And thoughts of personal interest all apart,
He follows where his sense of right doth lead,
  Perverse in views alone, upright in heart.

L.

Imagination in these early days
O'ertopping reason robs her of her dues ;
Time will correct the balance : sons will use
A light their fathers knew not ; and its rays
Will show heaven's truth in many a varied phase.
Growth is the law of life ; shall man refuse
All vital growth to his own thoughts and views
And never roam at large in untracked ways?

New generations take new tones and hues,
And much that seems opposed is but diverse,
And fuller light all discords may disperse,
And when yon world shall open to our gaze
All honest thought its seeming taint will lose,
And guilt engross our blame, and worth our praise.

LI.

How strangely balanced is emotion's flow :
  Joy kindles grief, and grief engenders joy :
  A sated passion the dulled soul will cloy ;
And torpid languor follows pleasure's glow.
And oft a passion thwarted will endow
  With energies unwonted ; lift and buoy
  The soul mid highest ranges ; and employ
The choicest powers our kindly fates bestow.

Hence comes it that the man unscathed by storm,
  Uncrossed in dearest wish, doth ever stand
  On the low levels of the spirit-land :
Hence sorrow, pain, and disappointment form
  In every age and clime the bitter root
  That yieldeth high endowment for its fruit.

LII.

Our deepest thoughts are often the least clear;
The gifted man will ever feel the need
Of language to express his inmost creed,—
All that he holds most sacred and most dear.
Just as the eye in range transcends the ear,
Thoughts that from Nature's central heart proceed
Float like the stars from all word-clothing freed:
For we can echo only what we hear.

Ah, if the feebler faculty can match
Its stronger sister in the coming time,
Our listening ears by sure degrees will catch
The mellow music of the spheres sublime:
Grant such a law, and saint, and seer, and sage
Will tell the world new truths from age to age.

LIII.

If for a while we look with thoughtful eye
  Upon our physical needs, the food, the fire,
  The clothes, the very house-room we require,
We cannot doubt that they who hold the key
Of nature's store-house and her granary
  Must ever constitute the ruling power :
  For all our frail lives need from hour to hour
The storage in their keeping must supply.

From facts like these this inference we draw,—
  Subordination of our worthiest part
To sorry physical needs is nature's law ;
  Thoughts of the mind, and promptings of the heart.
In this poor world must take an humble rôle,
And seek to modify, but not control.

LIV.

We need a special training to fulfil
Our several functions with efficiency;
Statesman, physician, lawyer, all must be
Drilled from their youth by men of practised skill:
And strength of mind it needs, and force of will
To gain due tact and insight. Nor can we
Dispense with students of past history,—
Men like De Tocqueville, Comte, and Grote, and Mill.

To such as these is this grand task assigned;—
To trace the bearing and the tendency
Of the slow movement of the human mind
Onward from its first dawn: and to apply
The wisdom thus matured to guide the age,
And to prepare the future they presage.

LV.

Worthy precursors of a coming dawn
Your efforts are not vain nor premature;
Although perchance the man is yet unborn
Who for our glorious England shall secure
The boon ye crave for. One day men shall stand
With hearts untrammelled, and with minds unbought,
All honoured in the pulpits of our land
And give to eager ears their latest thought.

Go on, brave hearts, and when your powers shall fail,
Your work seem all undone, faint not, nor yield;
Be sure your earnest strivings shall avail
To nerve a younger band the sword to wield;
And when glad hearts the hour of triumph hail,
When of the struggle history tells the tale,
Your names shall live on some mementive shield
Writ in gold letters on an azure field.

LVI.

By various means are the same ends fulfilled
Changing with changing time; a circling haze
Doth hide the future from the clearest gaze;
For our poor age can boast no prescient guild.
Not in long foresight were our fathers skilled:
Nobly they laboured in the olden days;
And yet the fanes their reverent hands did raise
'Tis ours with reverent purpose to unbuild.

As a poor crab, by instinct sure directed,
With many a throe doth struggle to be freed
From the strait trammels of its narrow shell;—
Nor heeds how long it served it, nor how well,
When it would crush the life it once protected;—
So change we ancient forms to serve new need.

LVII.

All human institutions have their base
On widely spread opinions; it were vain
To strive to alter those while these retain
Their ancient hold upon the human race:
If new opinions shall the old replace
New institutions will with time unfold
And shape themselves upon opinion's mould,
And lo, the world will take another face.

Ye who established order seek to change
Spend all your strength upon its fount and source,
Remould opinion: to the general play
Of vital growth and natural decay
Leave all the rest: so will you shape your course
Within the limits of its lawful range.

LVIII.

The cup of life he quaffed with so much zest—
Yet with a firm unyielding self-restraint
To which an Anchorite's force of will were faint—
Is drained to the last drop: blessing and blest,
Johnson has done his work and gone to rest.
Above is joy; below a wailing plaint;
Heaven hath an angel gained; earth lost a saint.

Yet not all lost: his greatest part and best,
His influence over living minds survives,—
And work we leave behind resumes our lives.—
So, onward, through unnumbered years, our friend
Will form, we think, appreciable part
Of many a great man's mind, and good man's heart,
And with all noble life his life will blend.

LIX.

Ye who are somewhat versed in this world's lore,
Have conned the histories of days gone by,
Dallied with science, art, and poesy,
And drank in knowledge from the classic store
Bequeathed us by the mighty minds of yore,
How oft with cold and unregarding eye
Ye're prone to gaze on poor humanity!
Ye love her not in the unpolished ore!

And yet man's noblest faculties are there;
And much he lacks of skill who fails to find
Within the depths of the untutored mind,
Quarries of richest thought: the truly wise
Will recognise the great, the good, the fair,
In much that worthless seems to other eyes.

LX.

In the eternities of space and time
Strangely to the vast universe conjoint
'Tis ours to occupy a single point;
A riddle to ourselves, dark and sublime.
And oft our life is wretched pantomime,
With idle fancies it deceives our view,
And we embrace them and believe them true
Alike in hoary age and youthful prime.

But is all doubtful? No, there shines from far—
O, let us follow—an unerring light,—
The eternal truths of justice love and right
To lead our true aim; as the bright star
Guided the eastern sages while they trod
The path that led them to their cradled God.

LXI.

I nursed a lovely gourd with tenderest care,
  Greenly it grew beneath the Summer rays,
  And fairest fruit in these late Autumn days
Methought was promised to my urgent prayer.
Alas, my gourd hath felt the northern air:
  To the dank ground hath fallen the shrivelled fruit;
  The leafy stem hath withered to the root:
And blank astonishment, and mute despair

Blot out all earnest faith in God and man!
  Lie still my heart, 'twere madness to complain,
  The hand that strikes perchance may strike with pain,
To fate's decrees e'en Jove must yield His plan;
  Another gourd I may not rear in vain;
For sure, my loved one, granteth all she can.

LXII.

Ah, no, it cannot be : an idle dream
Shall never on my mind such credence force ;
Avaunt, the night-hag that with croakings hoarse
Would tell me Margaret is not what I deem :
Far, far unlike the noisy foaming stream
That rusheth headlong from its mountain source
Patent to all observers, is the course
Of a true woman's love. The clearest beam

Reacheth not waters that flow underground ;
Nor doth the finest ear detect their sound :
Though Nymphs and Naiads sport upon the sand
Nor stream nor Nymphs nor Naiads herdsmen know :
Such living waters in far Hellas' land
Beneath immortal hills for ever flow.

LXIII.

As when some mighty river leaves the vale
Its living waters ploughed with their own force
And ploughs new pathway from its mountain source
An arid channel tells the dreary tale :
So where thy love of late, in calm or gale,
Poured that vast torrent which now makes divorce,
Complete and sudden, of its ancient course,
The footprints of its power will never fail.

Still will the parchèd furrows of my soul
Make mute appealing to the pitiless sky
That smiles above regardless of my pain :
Still shall I long to feel the rush and roll
Of the old stream adown its channels dry :
Yet must the life-long craving be in vain.

LXIV.

Good-bye, dear heart, good-bye, at length I see,
Stretching on either hand 'twixt thee and me,
A yawning gulf to be o'erpassèd never:
Good-bye, dear heart, for ever!

Upon a sunless earth in rugged ways
I shall go mourning on through all my days;
Without one hope to prompt a firm endeavour:
Good-bye, dear heart, for ever!

Good-bye, dear heart, and blessings with thee go!
My fainting spirit shall rejoice to know
That I alone shall feel the pangs that sever:
Good-bye, dear heart, for ever!

Good-bye, dear heart, good-bye, and when the tomb
Shall close for aye upon me, feel no gloom,
No touch of sadness; think upon me never:
Good-bye, dear heart, good-bye, good-bye for ever!

LXV.

In the heroic days for ever fled
  Men there have been, earth's glory and her pride,
  Who, lacking woman's love, have lived and died
In lone communion with the mighty dead.
And there have been fair women, all unwed,
  Who never for a living love have sighed,
  Whose deepest cravings have been satisfied
In giving all the heart to one who bled

Ages ago in far off Palestine.
Then may not I a myrtle leaf entwine
  For my own brow though Margaret be a dream?
May not the brain-spun fancy charm my heart,
And gratify some cravings, and impart
  To every dreary day some gilding beam?

LXVI.

A grief that hath its little touch of joy,
  Its tiny triumph o'er a small success
  In smoothing pillows to make suffering less ;—
Such feels a mother nursing her sick boy :
And I full oft a weary hour employ
  In soothing my maimed love in its distress ;
  And with a mother's thoughtful tenderness
I weave it a poor sonnet for a toy :

With this we play and dally for a while ;
  And then will come a season of brief rest,
  And sleep with sleeping love upon my breast :
Then comes the morning with its roseate smile,
  And though my nurseling's pangs are all renewed
  Renewed are patience, calmness, fortitude.

LXVII.

Predestined through all time to dwell apart.
Margaret, beloved of my soul, from thee,
What wonder if all hope, all energy,
All firm endeavour die within my heart.
What wonder if I shun the busy mart,
If from all social intercourse I flee ;
The chords of joy are all unstrung for me,
I only seek nepenthe for my smart.

Ah, thine was the grand force that could sustain
The healthy vigour of my heart and brain :
And had this passion of my soul found rest.
Hadst thou adorned my home and borne my name
I had sought honour with the keenest zest
And struggled hard for fortune and for fame.

LXVIII.

For many a year, sweet friend, we had not met;
Our letters had been rare, and brief, and cool;
For with firm will we had resolved to school
Hearts slow to learn and powerless to forget.
'Twas not for thee and me to fume and fret,
With brainless idiot wail to whine and pule,
When the firm fates that o'er mankind have rule
Severed our lives with wall and parapet.

Though different sorrows vex our daily life,
And different daily joys our life sustain,
One deathless love unites us heart and brain:
This, this is ours, and those but mine and thine:
Oh, let us end for aye a bootless strife,
And nurse with blameless joy the gift divine.

LXIX.

The world may shape at will my whitening beard,
And trim the waning glories of my head,
It shall not lay my heart upon the bed
Of old Procrustes to be pruned and sheared.
Too greatly are its fancied censures feared;
Let us press on by truest instincts led,
Press boldly on nor pale with craven dread
If in our hearts' own forum we are cleared.

Yet it is meet a reverent ear to lend
To judgments ever wise and just and true
When all the facts are patent to the view;
And erring only when those facts transcend
All due cognition. Such the case might be,
Were judgment passed, sweet friend, on thee and me.

LXX.

Emotions duty-bound wide range of thought
Cultured 'mid fortunate environment
With Dian's classic face and form were blent
In thee, and thus heaven's master-work was wrought.
And thus I found thee, dear one, all unsought:
From soul to soul the combining flash was sent,
Each in the other found the complement
Of a half life: by surest instinct taught.

Years have confirmed a moment's estimate:
In the grand features of thy mind I read
The rôle of woman in the coming time;
To rouse to noble thought and worthy deed,
To wake emotions generous and sublime,
And be the type of all things good and great.

LXXI.

The laws that rule our being have their source
  Above, around, beyond ourselves, and we
  Than yonder starry orbs are not more free
To shape our bearing and direct our course.
The world may shriek its myriad voices hoarse,
  It cannot countervail the destiny
  That bindeth thee to me and me to thee
With all-prevailing, gravitating force.

Alas! not all-prevailing, dearest heart,
  Nor this poor world all powerless have we found,
  But each by each is limited and bound;
  And centrifugal, centripetal power
  Balance and check each other hour by hour:
This links our souls, that holds our lives apart.

LXXII.

Ah! I have seen full many a Summer fly
And many a weary Winter reach its goal
Since love for thee upon my spirit stole,
'A presence that was not to be put by!'
Time hath not dulled the edge of ecstasy;
Still art thou, dear one, to my inmost soul
Zenith and nadir of emotion's roll,
Fount of deep sorrow, spring of pleasures high!

Forbidden Eden of heart! and yet
I feel the rolling years have wrought some change:
Continuous sorrow melts to mild regret;
Joy's brief delirium turns to settled calm;
The gamut of my mind takes wider range;
And a pure love doth yield perennial balm.

LXXIII.

Our hopes sometimes beyond all hope prevail
And find a brief fruition. It was mine
In life's full flush with wild desire to pine
For heaven's own nectar, boldly to assail
Olympus, and its utmost summit scale,
And snatch from teeming banquet-board divine
A brimming beaker of Elysian wine
While the couched gods myself a god did hail.

Since that glad hour no draught from mortal ewer
Can quench the parching fever of my heart,
Or thrill its pulses with a full delight;
Yet do the pitying gods sometimes impart
The power to climb again the Olympic height
And quaff fresh beakers of the vintage pure.

LXXIV.

In fairyland I rode for one brief hour,
Myself a fairy prince; and by my side—
A very goddess—rode my mystic bride
With all Diana's beauty for her dower.—
My mystic bride! I claimed her by the power
Of conquering love that with unresting tide
Had worn and sapped all barriers: I defied
The world to rob me of life's crown and flower.

Could sober thought to this wild dream respond,
Could Margaret own the adamantine bond,
Then were my blank misgivings all unlearned:
Yet this pure joy may glad me to the end;
The friend of olden days is still my friend:
Such guerdon lavish wealth of love hath earned.

LXXV.

When the bright sun doth flame upon the sea
  The broad expanse reflects nor moon nor star,
  But when he shines on regions distant far
On lesser lights the sea looks lovingly:
And in my heart's long night most gratefully
  I welcome any face that can beguile
  My weary watching with a kindly smile,
Yet never lose my fixed desire for thee.

Margaret, for refuge whither can I turn?
  I dream my heart is a vast river dammed,
    Whose waters rushing from a thousand hills
  In one poor channel may not all be crammed,
    But find brief issue in small casual rills:—
The ocean thou, for which they vainly yearn.

LXXVI.

Myself alone can know how wearily
The months pass and the years that I must spend
Without one word of greeting from my friend:—
My friend? Cold name for one I hold to be
A dearer self: by some strange mystery
Pivot and centre of my soul; the end
And aim of thoughts and feelings that transcend
All routine duties: life's sole poetry!

To-day, by favour of the powers above,
Our rarely meeting orbits touched awhile:
I only saw the beauty of her face;
I only felt the radiance of her smile;
Heard only—'twas enough—that the old love
Within her heart's calm depths held the old place.

LXXVII.

I only sing as sings a poor caged bird
  Whose mate afar in other cage doth dwell;
  Or as the wires that stretch o'er hill and dell
Sing at their work; not caring to be heard.
I needs must sing; so much my heart is stirred
  By a late greeting and a long farewell;
  The tumult now hath calmed to rythmic swell,
And this again transforms to rythmic word.

A liquid simmering in the chemist's flask
  Dissolveth more than, cooling, it can hold:
  And drops bright crystals as it groweth cold:
And when in warmth of thy dear smile I bask
  My heart becomes surcharged; and love's excess
  Shapes into sonnets when the warmth is less.

LXXVIII.

As old Vesuvius sometimes slacks his fires
And slumbers till the dwellers on the plain
Deem the old fury will not wake again,
So fares it with the course of my desires:
Wildly I strike my harp and snap its wires:
Then baffled, weary, faint with sigh and strain
To wake thy once responsive chords again,
Back into hidden depths my love retires.

Retires—nor smoke, nor spark, nor flame appears;
Retires without a sign; yet smoulders on
In contact ever with vast central stores;
And gathers strength in the deep calm of years;
And when you think the ancient force is gone,
Again the flames mount up, the lava pours.

LXXIX.

I know I feed on fancies: well I know
  This love of mine finds feeble faint response
  Or only thoughtful kindly tolerance
And woman's saintly pity. Be it so!
Be it to thee a tale of long ago,—
  A pastime that beguiled thy fancy once,
  And give to me the rôle of Bourbon dunce,
Oblivious ever of time's ceaseless flow.

And be thou France, changeless despite all change!
  Though banished from thy realm in fancy's dream
    I'll hold it mine for aye by solemn vow:
Through town and lordly forest I will range,
  And in love's right divine reign lord supreme,
    And deem thy crown is ever on my brow.

LXXX.

It had been well, perchance, had I not known
That earth contained one being on whose breast
I could have laid my head and found full rest;
Since I could never make the prize my own:
But the hour came when, panoplied, full grown,—
Like Pallas from Jove's brain in armour drest,—
On my tranced sight arose the unbidden guest,
And straightway rose a footstool and a throne.

Footstool and throne remain: she dwells apart:
Yet must I bless the pregnant hour when first,
In the full heyday of my manhood's prime,
The revelation on my spirit burst
And a quick flame was kindled in my heart
Potent to melt the keen-edged scythe of Time.

LXXXI.

In age collect love's petals one by one
Prepare them daintily with salt and spice
And place them in a vase of costly price ;
Some fragrance they may keep when thou art gone.
Yet ere thy Autumn suns are all outshone
And Winter brings its snows and frosts and ice
Learn that love's flowering season comes not twice,
And tend stray fruit that hangs thy branches on.

Though gods, and men, and columns have denied
Fruition to thy hopes, find happiness
In works of justice, deeds of righteousness
Grander than love, toward which all love should tend.
And one day heaven may ope its portals wide
And holy Mary place thee by thy friend.

LXXXII.

Yes, 'works of justice, deeds of righteousness
Grander than love, toward which all love may tend;'
Henceforth be these for me life's aim and end:—
Begone wild cries for unearned happiness!
Love oft is partial, blind, prone to excess;
But righteousness all weakness doth transcend;
Justice to partial dealing cannot bend,
And grants to equal rights nor more nor less.

And yet, since justice, righteousness, and love
Reign in eternal harmony above,
On earth, methinks, some concord they should know:
And he most surely walks life's path aright,
Who, blessed one, finds in those a calm clear light,
In this, warmth, colour, tone, and joyous glow.

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